

James Madison to George Washington, January 14, 1789. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO GEORGE WASHINGTON. WASH. MSS.

Orange, Jany 14th, 1789.

Dear Sir,

Your favor of the 2d instant, with the letters attending it never came to hand 'till last evening. I have good reason to believe that the delay happened between Alexanda & Fredg, rather than at or from the latter place. Mr. F. Maury pays particular attention to all letters which arrive there for me, and forwards them to Orange by opportunities which are frequent & safe. I apprehend there will be no impropriety in committing a confidential letter to that channel. As an additional precaution, I will desire him to be particularly attentive to any letter which may have your name on it.

I have heard from two only of the returns from the Electoral districts;¹ the one in favor of Mr. Gilchrist

1

Stephens Cabel

109 71 Albemarle.

270 Amherst.

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15 66 Fluvanna.

268 10 Spotsylva.

113 4 Orange.

177 26 Culpeper.

4 157 Buckingham.

686 604

82 bal. in favor of Stevens.

The unanimity in Amherst was produced by a previous declaration, as I am told, of Col. Cabel on the subject of the Presidt, which satisfied the federal party. Little attention seems to have been paid anywhere to the vice president. Among the bulk of the people, the choice of the President has been regarded as the sole subject of the election.— Madison's note.

—the other of General Stephens. He succeeded agst Col. Cabel by a majority of 82 votes. He owes his success to the coalition between the two parties in Spotsylva. My situation is unfavorable for intelligence from the State at large, and therefore I can say little of the prospects as to the Feby election.

I fear, from the vague accounts which circulate, that the federal candidates are likely to stand in the way of one another. This is not the case however in my district. The field is left entirely to Monroe & myself. The event of our competition will probably depend on the part to be taken by two or three descriptions of people, whose decision is not known, if not yet to be ultimately

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formed. I have pursued my pretensions much further than I had premeditated; having not only made great use of epistolary means, but actually visited two Counties, Culpeper & Louisa, and publicly contradicted the erroneous reports propagated agst me. It has been very industriously inculcated that I am dogmatically attached to the Constitution in every clause, syllable & letter, and therefore not a single amendment will be promoted by my vote, either from conviction or a spirit of accommodation.¹ This is the report most likely

1 TO GEORGE EVE.

January 2d, 1789

Sir,

Being informed that reports prevail not only that I am opposed to any amendments whatever to the new federal Constitution, but that I have ceased to be a friend to the rights of Conscience; and inferring from a conversation with my brother William, that you are disposed to contradict such reports as far as your knowledge of my sentiments may justify, I am led to trouble you with this communication of them. As a private Citizen it could not be my wish that erroneous opinions should be entertained, with respect to either of those points, particularly with respect to religious liberty. But having been induced, to offer my services to this district as its representative in the federal Legislature, considerations of a public nature make it proper that, with respect to both, my principles and views should be rightly understood.

I freely own that I have never seen in the Constitution as it now stands those serious dangers which have alarmed many respectable Citizens. Accordingly whilst it remained unratified, and it was necessary to unite the States in some one plan, I opposed all previous alterations as calculated to throw the States into dangerous contentions, and to furnish the secret enemies of the Union with an opportunity of promoting its dissolution. Circumstances are now changed. The Constitution is established on the ratifications of eleven States and a very great majority of the people of America; and amendments, if

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pursued with a proper moderation and in a proper mode, will be not only safe, but may serve the double purpose of satisfying the minds of well meaning opponents, and of providing additional guards in favour of liberty. Under this change of circumstances, it is my sincere opinion that the Constitution ought to be revised, and that the first Congress meeting under it ought to prepare and recommend to the States for ratification, the most satisfactory provisions for all essential rights, particularly the rights of Conscience in the fullest latitude, the freedom of the press, trials by jury, security against general warrants &c. I think it will be proper also to provide expressly in the Constitution, for the periodical increase of the number of Representatives until the amount shall be entirely satisfactory, and to put the judiciary department into such a form as will render vexatious appeals impossible. There are sundry other alterations which are either eligible in themselves, or being at least safe, are recommended by the respect due to such as wish for them.

I have intimated that the amendments ought to be proposed by the first Congress. I prefer this mode to that of a General Convention—1st. because it is the most expeditious mode. A Convention must be delayed until # of the State Legislatures shall have applied for one, and afterwards the amendments must be submitted to the States; whereas if the business be undertaken by Congress the amendments may be prepared and submitted in March next. 2dly. because it is the most certain mode. There are not a few States who will absolutely reject the proposal of a Convention, and yet not be averse to amendments in the other mode.—lastly, it is the safest mode. The Congress who will be appointed to execute as well as to amend the Government, will probably be careful not to destroy or endanger it. A Convention, on the other hand, meeting in the present ferment of parties, and containing perhaps insidious characters from different parts of America, would at least spread a general alarm, and be but too likely to turn everything into confusion and uncertainty. It is to be observed however that the question concerning a General Convention, will not belong to the federal Legislature. If # of the States apply for one, Congress cannot refuse to call it; if not, the other mode of amendments must be pursued.
— *Mad. MSS.*

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to affect the election, and most difficult to be combated with success within the limited period. There are a number of others however which are auxiliaries to it.—With my respectful compliments to Mrs. Washington, & the others of your family,

I remain, Dear Sir, your most obedt & affecte. Servt.